Back Care Basics



WHAT'S AT STAKE

A back injury can begin a lifetime of pain, inability to work or play, reduced income and unhappy dealings with medical agencies.

WHAT'S THE DANGER

Back injuries are either cumulative or are a traumatic injury caused by an isolated incident. Falls, a motor vehicle wreck or a misjudged dive into water are common causes of traumatic back injuries. With cumulative injury, years of back abuse and minor strains and sprains create a problem which can be seriously disabling. Since our back is used in tasks on and off the job, the exact cause of injury may be difficult to pinpoint. This leads to disputes about compensation. Therapy may be ineffective and there may be differences of opinion about your ability to hold a job again.

EXAMPLE

Sven suffered a traumatic injury from falling off a rafter at work onto a stack of two-by-fours. His spinal cord was injured, and he lost the use of his arms and legs.

HOW TO PROTECT YOURSELF

- Always wear a seatbelt in a motor vehicle.
- Never ride with a driver who is under the influence of drugs or alcohol.
- Wear the correct fall arrest equipment and follow all safe work practices when working at heights.
- Before diving into water, be sure it is deep enough and there are no underwater obstructions.
- Don't mix alcohol or drugs with water sports, snowmobiling or other recreational activities.
- To prevent cumulative back injuries, lift correctly. Size up the load first.
- Lift by using the strength in your legs. Bend your knees and keep your back straight. Crouch close to the object and lift by straightening your legs.
- Don't twist, bend or extend your arms when carrying an object. Hold it as close to your body as possible.
- Don't pick up or put down an object above your shoulder height. Use a

stepladder or stepstool if necessary.
- Before carrying an item, plan your route—including where you will set it down.
- Don’t attempt to catch a heavy object if it falls or someone tosses it.
- Don’t sit or stand too long in one position. If your job requires standing, alternate feet on a raised footrest. Floor mats can help prevent back strains of workers required to stand at their workstations throughout their shift.
- Practice good posture at all times.
- Maintain a healthy weight.

FINAL WORD

Back care must be part of every activity you do. Lift carefully, practice good posture and use caution at work and off the job.